

Matthew 21:1-11

To have a better understanding of Palm Sunday we need to understand what was going on at that time. We need to have an idea what the political situation was in and around Jerusalem, we need to know about the political revolution. The political revolution started around 63 BC when a Roman general conquered Israel, placing the Israelites under the Roman rule and powers. The Jewish people wanted to get rid of the Romans because the Romans enforced their way of living on to them. The Romans made the Jews eat pork and worship Caesar. The Romans even forbid them from circumcising their child, a common Jewish practice. The Romans were trying to seduce them out of Judaism. Thus, a revolution had begun.

Several years later, around 5 BC, King Herod enters the picture. Herod was known as the great builder because he rebuilt the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. It was a magnificent temple. Then Herod went from the great builder to the Killer. This is the story we are familiar with. He ordered all boys two years old and younger to be killed. He had heard about this Messiah, this great king being born. Herod didn't want this baby messiah to grow up and be a great political king and push him out of the way.

Years later, when Jesus was a young man, a Pharisee by the name of Zaduk led a revolution in and around Jerusalem. It is believed that 2,000 men were killed and the Romans hung them on crosses along the road ways. It was not a small portion of the road way but twenty miles. Can you imagine dead men hanging on crosses along I-94, all the way into the city? This is the message that was being sent to the Jewish population if they started a political uprising.

Jesus was aware of the revolts, the riots. When Jesus came riding into Jerusalem it is believed there had been over 30 political riots in about 5 years. So as a young man Jesus knew about these riots, 5 or 6 riots a year for 5 years. Our Gospel reading for today gives a sense of what's going on in Jerusalem, and that all the elements for another riot are present and the city could erupt.

The tension could be felt that first Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Matthew tells us that it was a very large crowd welcoming Jesus. There were thousands and thousands, possible millions of people who made their pilgrimage to the holy city to celebrate the Passover. It was a massive crowd that had gathered full of women, children, men. I don't know if you have ever seen the streets in Jerusalem, but they are not very big. They are very narrow so the crowd was jammed in the streets shoulder to shoulder and pushing so they could see Jesus, the Messiah, the king.

There were a different groups of people in this massive crowd who were shouting at the top of their lungs "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hosanna in the highest!"

One of the groups shouting their praise was the religious fanatics, shouting "Jesus show us another miracle and then we'll believe. Let us see the blind given sight. Let us see the deaf able to hear. Let us see you heal the sick." This is our Messiah...

The next group that was shouting their praise were the political fanatics, shouting "Jesus restore our freedom and overthrow the Romans! Lead us to victory with the power of your sword and save us." This is our Messiah.

Messiah means “the anointed,” the one promised by God to deliver Israel. With their chants of “Hosanna” the crowds were proclaiming Jesus to be their messiah. “Hosanna” is a translation of a Hebrew expression “*O save*.” This draws a connection to the Jewish tradition of singing a portion of the Psalms during the season of the Passover. In these Psalms you can hear the messianic hope being expressed. One Psalm you can hear that messianic hope in is Psalm 118:25, which says “O Lord Save us.” Then by also using the title “Son of David” they are referring to Jesus as a figure who would bring about David’s throne and pointing to the messianic lineage and royal expectation. So we hear the crowd’s expectations with their chants.

Also In the crowd you have the religious leaders who are concerned. They’re concerned about the authority Jesus is claiming because it’s a divine authority.

Then you have the disciples following Jesus who are pushing their way through the mob of people. They are getting pushed around and are confused at the excitement of all the people. Jesus told them he was coming to Jerusalem and he was going to suffer and die here. The disciples remembered what Jesus had told them, yet they hear the cheers from the crowd proclaiming him as their messiah. The disciples still didn’t understand. They didn’t understand who Jesus really was and what he was riding into.

The crowd is right, Jesus is the Messiah, but not the messiah they want him to be. By the chaotic madness of the crowd you would think that Jesus came into the city standing on the back of a chariot raising his arms in victory. Yet he rode in on a donkey. The crowd wanted him to ride in on a white horse dressed in gold trim glowing in the sunlight and Jesus gripping a sword in his hand, waving it above his head signaling what he would do to the Romans. They want an inspiring speech to lead a revolution; they wanted shouts of soldiers but they heard none of that. Jesus didn’t say a word. Not a word as he rode into the city. The prophet Zachariah tells us that the king will “Come gentle and riding on a donkey.” Another translation is “he will come humble and riding on a donkey.” He will come humbly into Jerusalem.

The crowd was chanting at the top of their lungs “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Hosanna in the highest!” Slowly the shouts of Hosanna began to fade and it was quieter, then nothing. In the distance you can hear another chant start up, it was very faint, crucify him, it got louder and louder, crucify him, and finally bursting with power, Crucify him, Crucify him. They wanted a warrior on a horse and instead they got a humble carpenter on a donkey.

Jesus knew what the people wanted him to be and he knew he could not provide them with a sword swinging messiah. Jesus knew that this triumphant entry was not going to end the way others wanted it to. Jesus knew that the triumph that would take place would be much greater than what they were expecting.

We read this story every year, but this year when I read it I heard something new. I heard the story of a man riding into Jerusalem to begin an adverse journey that lies ahead of him. He knew he was going to suffer and die. Yet, he was doing God’s work. Jesus still rides into the city knowing he was going to die. I hear a story of courage, a story of courage to ride forward in adversity to do God’s work.

This story helps us discover and hear that God has not entered our lives to help us with our work, but is calling us back to do God’s work. During Lent we took time to reflect and examine our lives. During that time something happens, something takes place and disrupts the daily business of our lives. It is the Holy Spirit challenging the

way our faith has partnered with our wallets and our work that only serves our personal agenda. The crowd wanted Jesus to lead with a sword, but he didn't he road through the city, to the cross.

God will provide us with the courage and the strength to face the challenge of emptying our selfish pride, our ambition, and our fears, to follow Jesus through the city and to the cross.

The story of Jesus' triumphant entry is a story that shares with us courage and strength to keep riding forward on our faith journey. We know we can face the adverse situations and the challenges to our faith. We hear the story every year, Jesus enters Jerusalem to die on the cross. We know how the story ends, we know that Jesus brings us hope and conquers death.

As we continue our journey and enter this Holy Week I pray that we have received the courage of Jesus Christ and that we will join each other at the empty tomb and celebrate in the hope of Jesus Christ. Amen.